

BIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES,  
1534 - 1829

Materials towards a biographical dictionary  
of Catholic History in the British Isles  
from the breach with Rome to Catholic  
Emancipation.

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BIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

# RECUSANT HISTORY

A Journal of Research in Post-Reformation  
Catholic History in the British Isles

*Edited for the Catholic Record Society  
by A. F. Allison and D. M. Rogers*

1. Ten Years of *Recusant History*. By the Editors
2. Contents of Volumes 1—5.

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## TEN YEARS OF RECUSANT HISTORY

By THE EDITORS

With the issue for January 1961 *Recusant History* begins its eleventh year of publication, and it seems fitting that we should mark the completion of a decade by giving a brief report on the work of the past ten years and indicating our plans for the future.

When we began, in January 1951, to publish a periodical with the title *Biographical Studies . . . Materials towards a biographical dictionary of Catholic history in the British Isles from the breach with Rome to Catholic Emancipation*, we formulated our policy in these words: "So much material has come to light since the publication of such standard works as Foley's *Records*, Gillow's *Bibliographical Dictionary*, and the *Dictionary of National Biography*, that it is desirable that the biographies in them should be revised and supplemented and that others should be added." On looking back, however, it is apparent that the launching of the periodical coincided with a substantial revival of interest in post-Reformation Catholic history in this country. One feature of the revival has been that students have found in this field of study new and important subjects of research. Articles of merit were offered to us which were not solely biographical in content. In deciding to publish such studies we showed that we had come to realize that the periodical which we had intended as a means to the creation of a new and scholarly biographical dictionary ought really to serve a wider purpose.

In a word, we had made our original terms of reference too narrow. What was needed was a periodical that would lay the foundations of a general history of Catholicism in these islands since the Reformation. The title was changed, therefore, to *Recusant History*. A *journal of research in post-Reformation Catholic history in the British Isles*. "Six years ago," we wrote in our preface to vol. 4, no. 1, "*Biographical Studies* began as



an experimental publication. Our main intention then was to try and repair, by gradual stages, some of the omissions and errors in Gillow's *Bibliographical Dictionary of the English Catholics*, and we defined our terms of reference accordingly. It soon became apparent, however, that by insisting too rigidly upon them, we should have to exclude much valuable work in the field of Recusant history for which there was no other organ of publication. With the permission of the Council of the Catholic Record Society, which took over editorial direction in 1953, we began tacitly to disregard our original terms of reference and to publish research on any aspect of Recusant history. Our new title, therefore, is not an indication of a break in policy but a formal endorsement of a change which has been gradually taking place for some time." It might be well at this point to explain the significance of the new title. Strictly speaking, a recusant was anyone who refused to attend the Anglican church service when such attendance was obligatory by law. But the word came to be applied particularly to Catholics who refused conformity, and by extension it is now used as a convenient general term to describe in one word what pertains to Catholicism during its period as a proscribed creed. It is in this general sense that we use the word.

Extending the scope of the periodical meant not only affording publication to scholarly contributions from new fields of research, but also by such publication serving the wider needs of historians. Scholars will be aware that no one has yet written a full and adequate study of post-Reformation English Catholicism. The historian who aspires to do so must approach his subject from many points of view, each of which requires specialist knowledge. For example, in describing the techniques of repression which the English government employed against the Catholics, and judging their effect, he must not only be familiar with all the complexities of the recusancy laws and Exchequer procedure, but must also have at his disposal documentary evidence concerning Catholics of all levels of society at different periods and in different parts of the country. Clearly no one historian can acquire the necessary knowledge of these and other specialist matters by tackling all the primary sources for himself. We are trying to prepare the way for the general historian by assembling for him the specialist studies he needs.

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This periodical, therefore, aims to provide the historian with the matter on which to base his judgments. But a historian has not only to make judgments; he has also to organize his material into an intelligible whole. This is difficult enough in itself, but if it further entails the necessity to present in detail the evidence for a complicated mass of statements, inferences and conjectures, the task becomes well-nigh impossible unless all attempt at coherent and orderly exposition is abandoned. The footnote system breaks down when a footnote becomes an essay requiring its *own* footnotes. The historian should be able to pursue his narrative unhampered by the need to make too many asides, and for this to be possible he should be able to refer for his evidence to material already in print.

Let us illustrate this by quoting two recent articles in *Recusant History* which treat exhaustively of matters in themselves obscure and involved which nevertheless have important bearings on the history of English Catholicism. It is clearly essential for the historian to know the attitude of the English Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries towards armed rebellion against a persecuting sovereign. Were any of them involved, for example, in the Gunpowder Plot, as the government of the time, and also some fellow-Catholics, tried to maintain? If it could be shown that the Society of Jesus was in fact involved, the implications would be far-reaching. In "John Gerard and the Gunpowder Plot" (Vol. 5, no. 2), the evidence for the alleged complicity of one prominent Jesuit is subjected to a detailed examination which would be quite out of place in a general history. The second example relates to complicated diplomatic negotiations which took place in 1603. These aimed at establishing some kind of unofficial liaison between James I and the Pope, and persuading Philip III to make toleration for English Catholics a condition of peace between Spain and England. The negotiations and their background are set out in detail in "The Embassy of Sir Anthony Standen in 1603" by L. Hicks, the first two parts of which have now been published (Vol. 5, nos. 3, 5). Both articles are examples of footnotes to history, but footnotes too extensive to occupy the pages of a general work.

Despite our change of title and the enlargement of scope which the new title reflects, biography has always featured extensively in this



periodical and will continue to do so. If any such biographical dictionary as we at first envisaged is one day to be written, it cannot ignore this accumulating collection of materials. Similarly, although history is no longer thought of simply as the lives of great men, it remains true that the historian needs a framework of carefully documented biographical detail if he is to chronicle and appraise correctly the clash of personalities and the interplay of men and events. Biographical contributions to *Recusant History* have ranged in extent from articles embracing a man's entire life, such as that on "Henry Constable, Poet and Courtier" by George Wickes (Vol. 2, no. 4), and that on "Peter Philips, Composer and Organist" by A. G. Petti (Vol. 4, no. 2), down to notes a page or two long elucidating single points relating to the parentage, birth, life and activities of English Catholics.

Both long and short contributions are valuable and will continue to be welcomed. The full-dress biography requires no justification, but from the start we have also invited short notes for the purpose of recording evidence as it comes to light and thereby stimulating further research. Documents and references which may establish hitherto unknown biographical facts often come the way of the researcher by chance, usually when he is looking for something entirely different. He will probably make a note of such random discoveries but will be tempted to lay them aside for lack of time to follow them up. By putting them into print, even as they stand, he may make a contribution to our knowledge of a man's life, the significance of which may not always be apparent to the finder. Sometimes the publication of this type of chance discovery will lead to more extended researches at a later date; sometimes it will illuminate material already in print. For example, ten years ago we published a biographical article (Vol. 1, no. 1) on John Abbot, the Catholic poet and confessor, which materially corrected and supplemented two confusing accounts of him in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Two autobiographical documents have now been found in the Westminster Cathedral Archives which answer several questions that had to be left open when the article was written. The forthcoming publication of these documents in *Recusant History* will show how an article in print and a chance discovery years later can explain and illuminate each other.



Among biographical subjects of special interest are the lives and careers of the English Martyrs. If we single out for mention one or two examples of martyr studies that have appeared in *Recusant History*, it is either because they exemplify the use of new and unfamiliar sources of evidence, or because they subject traditional accounts to fresh scrutiny and revaluation. Thus, Hugh Bowler has explored the intricacies of Exchequer procedure to throw new light on two little-known Yorkshire martyrs, Ven. John Talbot and Ven. John Bretton (Vol. 2, nos. 1, 2), while J. E. Bamber makes use of detailed local record sources to investigate the birthplace and date and place of execution of the Cumberland martyr, Ven. Christopher Robinson (Vol. 4, no. 1). The results of re-testing the existing accounts are illustrated by Dr. Ann Forster's article (Vol. 4, no. 5) proving that the missionary labours and martyrdom of Ven. William Southerne belong not to Staffordshire, as hitherto stated, but to Tyneside, and by an article (Vol. 2, no. 2) in which university and diocesan records are used to confirm and expand the brief account of Ven. Robert Sutton of Stafford written by a seventeenth century martyrologist.

Family history has a unique importance in the study of recusancy. At least until the beginning of the eighteenth century, throughout most of England the survival of Catholicism was dependent on those Catholic landed families able and willing to shelter a priest. Not until we know a great deal more than we do at present about the families in a given area, and can determine which among them were Catholic during what periods, and can identify the houses used regularly as Mass-centres, shall we understand the local organization of the Church, county by county. This aspect of church organization has been illustrated by such articles as those of Brigadier Trappes-Lomax on the Berkeley family in Worcester-shire (Vol. 1, no. 1) and the Englefields in Berkshire (Vol. 1, no. 2). In addition, the massive articles by Hugh Aveling on the Yorkshire Fairfaxes—of which the first two appeared in Vol. 3, no. 2 and Vol. 4, no. 2, and a third follows in the present number—show how much light can be thrown on the everyday lives of Catholics and on their education, social and political attitudes, family connections and economic circumstances, by a detailed chronicle of a single Recusant family generation by generation in all its ramifications.

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Since the principal sources for this kind of local history are to be found to a large extent in local archives, this is a branch of Recusant studies which should increasingly appeal to those who have an interest in the Catholic past of their own areas, and live within reach of county and diocesan record offices. In the last year or two several regional societies have been founded with the object of carrying out a thorough search for Recusant material among all types of local records. The fruits of this research for a single county are already being published in the *Essex Recusant*. If more and more material of this sort finds its way into print locally, *Recusant History* can increasingly devote itself to studies of wider range.

Should the local history of Recusant families and groups and of the local organization of missionary activities gradually be taken over by county Recusant societies, there would remain nevertheless a range of subjects which we consider mainly the concern of *Recusant History*. The fortunes of the English Catholics need to be studied not only at the local level but also where they are caught up in the general movement of the Counter-Reformation. The conflict of opinions about the nature and extent of the Pope's authority; the effects of foreign diplomacy on English Catholic affairs; efforts to achieve a *modus vivendi* with the government; the higher organization and direction of the Catholic missionary effort; these are some examples of general topics concerning which a host of particular detailed studies is needed. Some of these studies have already been written and a considerable body of important new material has by now been built up in these pages. For instance, W. K. L. Webb's "Thomas Preston, O.S.B., alias Roger Widdrington" (Vol. 2, no. 3) throws light on the controversy surrounding the Oath of Allegiance of 1606. Further aspects of the same controversy are dealt with at length by Gerard Sitwell in "Leander Jones's Mission to England, 1634-5" (Vol. 5, no. 4). T. A. Stroud has described, in "Father Thomas Wright—a Test Case for Toleration" (Vol. 1, no. 3), the single-handed attempts to achieve toleration for English Catholics made by a priest working in the circle of the Earl of Essex. In "English Catholics without a Bishop, 1655-1672" (Vol. 4, no. 4), T. A. Birrell has detailed the efforts of the English Chapter to secure a bishop of its own choosing. Among further examples which we



could cite of articles on specific points which nevertheless have important bearings on general issues, are J. A. Bossy's "English Catholics and the French Marriage, 1577-81" (Vol. 5, no. 1), which is a study of the false hopes raised by the projected marriage between the Duc d'Alençon and Queen Elizabeth, and T. H. Clancy's investigation of the proposals for the eventual re-organization of the Catholic Church in England in his "Notes on Persons's *Memorial for the Reformation of England*" (Vol. 5, no. 1).

We feel that the principle that general historical studies must rely to a considerable degree on the findings of the specialist in his own field, justifies the emphasis we have placed on bibliography during the past decade. The books which circulated among the Recusants are important not only because their existence testifies to the courage and resourcefulness of generations of authors and printers in the face of enormous difficulties, but also because they must form a large part of our material for any systematic study of Catholic thought in England. A scholar working, let us say, on the attitude of English Catholics to the theory of the papal deposing power and its political consequences, needs to know what books were written for the use of English Catholics and at whose instigation they were printed. But because Catholic books in penal times had to be printed and distributed in secret, and copies are now often difficult to locate since so many were destroyed by the government, and because even when found such books frequently conceal the author's identity and the real place of printing, he can obtain reliable information only from someone who has made an extensive study of the bibliographical evidence. Information of this kind concerning one large group of Recusant books will be found in "A Catalogue of Catholic Books in English, printed abroad or secretly in England, 1558-1640" (Vol. 3, nos. 3, 4). This catalogue furnishes details about nearly a thousand books of which almost a third were previously unrecorded. It identifies for the first time hundreds of anonymous authors and translators, deals with the problems of undated books, and ascribes to their rightful presses the many books issued with false imprint or none. It was not possible, of course, in handling such a mass of facts within the compass of a moderate-sized and inexpensive catalogue, to quote the evidence justifying each statement.



But some of the evidence has already been published in *Recusant History* in bibliographical articles, for instance those on Franciscan books (Vol. 3, no. 1), Thomas Wright (Vol. 1, no. 4), Henry Garnet (Vol. 1, no. 1), and Thomas Everard (Vol. 2, no. 3). In the course of the next few years we hope to publish the rest of the evidence in two series, one dealing with that for authors and translators, the other with that for printers and presses. The first contribution to the former, a study of the evidence for attributing certain anonymous and pseudonymous books to the Carmelite priest Simon Stock in the early seventeenth century, will probably appear later this year.

As part of our plan to furnish specialist information on the contemporary printed literature of recusancy, we have begun the preparation of two further catalogues. One is of Catholic books, 1558-1640, by English writers (or by foreigners writing on English affairs) in all languages other than English. This will complement the catalogue of English books which we have already published. As it is the smaller in scope of the two catalogues, we hope to have it ready within the next year or two for publication as a single issue of *Recusant History*. The other is of Catholic books in English, 1641-1700. This is a much more ambitious undertaking and we cannot at present say when it is likely to be completed or how it will be published, but as a pledge of our intent Dr. Rogers is preparing for inclusion in the current volume of *Recusant History* an annotated list entitled "Catholic Books 1641-1700; a First Century of Additions and Corrections to Wing's *Short-Title Catalogue*."

There are wide fields as yet barely touched in *Recusant History* which await the attention of the historian. In the field of literature there has been an increasing awareness in recent years, brought about by the work of Mario Praz, Rosemary Freeman, Maria Hagedorn and Louis Martz, among others, that the literature and art of continental catholicism profoundly influenced the literature and art of sixteenth and seventeenth century England. It should be possible to make a more extensive study of this influence. For example, bibliographical research has now enabled us to survey all Recusant writings in English printed up to 1641. Knowing what these writings were, we can begin to examine to what extent they

formed a link between the continental Counter-Reformation and thought and art in England.

To the possible objection that *Recusant History* has concerned itself too exclusively with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the neglect of the later period, we may answer by quoting from our editorial note published in 1958: "The emphasis on this early period is likely to remain for some time to come. The causes which determined the history of the Church—and of Catholicism generally—in England, from the late seventeenth century until well into the nineteenth, lay far back in the early period, in the relationship between the Church and the government on the one hand, and between rival factions within the Catholic body on the other." Indeed, the early period itself cannot be properly understood in isolation from the medieval era which preceded it. For example, the origins of Renaissance political theory must be sought centuries earlier; neither Bellarmine nor his opponents are intelligible without a reading of Aquinas. We can only say, to those who look in vain in these pages for eighteenth and nineteenth century studies, that (perhaps for the very reasons we have just given) very little work seems to have been done on those centuries of a kind suitable for *Recusant History*, and that we should welcome more.

In conclusion, we should like to comment on a matter of principle. In recent years, research has tended to undermine some of the historical judgments of our predecessors: the "Whig" view, the "Protestant" view, the "Nineteenth century" view on this question or that now seem to be no longer valid because they are incapable of explaining all the facts that have been brought to light. It is important that Catholics should avoid the temptation to substitute a "Catholic" view which may be equally defective. The Catholic historian must submit the view which, moved by feelings of loyalty to his Church, he would prefer to see vindicated, to the same objective scrutiny as every other, and if the facts warrant its rejection, he must reject it.

From the same principle it follows that, in writing of centuries during which the Catholic Church itself was torn by internal conflicts, the

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historian must not allow any partisan loyalties to warp his faculty of judgment. The task, however distasteful, of describing these internal conflicts, is not one that he can shirk, since their consequences were so far-reaching. Nor can he merely describe, without formulating his own conclusions; but in coming to conclusions he must not make his facts fit preconceived theories. The treatment of topics which are of their nature controversial need not—and should not—be tendentious.

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1900

## The Progress of "Biographical Studies"

Send in here

By kind permission of the Editor of THE MONTH, we subjoin an article reprinted from the June issue of that periodical, in which an assessment is made by no less an authority than Fr. Basil Fitzgibbon of the importance of the contribution made to Catholic historical research by "Biographical Studies".

The appearance of "Biographical Studies" has met with a warm welcome from many quarters, and its reception by the public has been sufficiently encouraging, for a specialised journal of this nature, to allow the hope of a largely increased circulation as it becomes better known.

The work of editors, contributors, and management alike is entirely honorary. There are no office charges beyond cost of postages. Even so, present day production costs are such that a considerable increase in the number of subscribers is required to enable "Biographical Studies" to stand firmly on its own feet.

The best and the most efficacious form of advertisement for work well done is recommendation, and we appeal to our present readers to make the periodical known and to enlist new subscribers whenever and wherever possible. Prospectuses and subscription forms are available on request.

From THE MONTH, June 1951

### THE STUDY OF RECUSANT HISTORY

At a moment when anyone who founds a review runs greatly increased risk of financial loss, if happily in this sheltered land, of nothing more, the first number of Biographical Studies, founded to promote the study of the history of the English Recusants, makes a brave show, and its appearance should be reckoned something of an event. The modesty of its



dress in duplicated typescript, which is however of excellent quality, warns us that restrictive practices in industry and the heavy cost of printing and of paper may come, if unchecked, to have the same effects as a persecution of the press.

Biographical Studies also seems to catch something of the air of the products of the numerous secret presses, which the names of the joint-editors, A.F.Allison and D.Rogers, must lead us to expect will often figure in its pages. From these young scholars, who have had the vision and courage to set this venture on foot, we hope to receive shortly a definitive catalogue of secretly printed Recusant literature to 1640, based not only on their examination of the great national libraries but on extensive field-work in private libraries scattered throughout the country. Both contribute to this first number, and the quality of their articles shows that they have already established themselves as the leading authorities in the difficult subject of early Recusant bibliography. Both the initial achievement and the high promise of their enterprise deserves much praise and a warm commendation to the practical support of readers of THE MONTH.

It is to be hoped that Biographical Studies may play its part in dispelling much ignorance and legend about the role of Recusants in English history. To this end the times may well be thought propitious. Deprived of the sense of security and emancipated from the illusion of progress we are able to-day to understand the nature of religious persecution, and to enter into the minds of oppressors and oppressed. We have acquired a keen and deep concern for freedom at its very springs. As we pass through our streets, we brush against fugitives and exiles from other lands. Daily we receive from Europe such news as Europe received from England in Tudor and Stuart times of the dread concomitants of persecution, of man-hunting in the night, of "bloody questions" sustained in long interrogations, bogus plots, staged trials, torture-chambers and executions. Stirred by



such news to sympathy and fear, we comfort ourselves with the conviction that the spirit of freedom is not dead. Fearful as we are and must be of the extent to which determined groups of men may be able to condition the human mind to the acceptance of such beliefs as they may prescribe, we are bound to examine with a much more critical eye the resistance movement sustained by the English Recusants.

It would seem wholly impracticable to make a serious effort to estimate how justifiable and worthy of praise was the resistance of the main body of the English Recusants to persecution, unless an attempt is also made to reach a dispassionate judgment as to the extent to which the activity of the Appellant party and its sympathizers in the seventeenth century was founded on truth and justice; and to estimate how much this activity encouraged the persecutors to persevere in a double attack - direct persecution from without and disruption of the Recusant body from within. It is to be hoped that the appearance of this new periodical is a sign and promise that this effort will be made. It is a task which will call for great integrity, courage and patience, but it is one which must be undertaken if ever a famous prophecy made on the scaffold is to be fulfilled beyond all cavil: "God lives, posterity will live, their judgment is not so liable to corruption as that of those who now condemn us to death".

BASIL FITZGIBBON.

